

**PUC Electric Retail Choice
Consumer Education Program
Itemized Billing Approved Plan**

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Prepared for the:

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Component

Media Relations & Community Education-- Itemized Billing

Overview

The introduction of Itemized Billing in January 1999 is a natural springboard to acquaint Maine consumers with the upcoming dynamics of Electric Restructuring. We have learned from the focus groups that consumers are curious about what will be happening and would like to learn about Electric Restructuring as soon as possible. But perhaps most importantly, they are looking to the PUC as the source for unbiased information about Electric Restructuring.

Message

The Education Campaign message for the Itemized Billing phase of the plan is twofold: 1) to describe the upcoming changes to consumer electric bills; and 2) to place Itemized Billing in context (Choice is coming). We will need to inform consumers about the history and timetable of Electric Restructuring and how Itemized Billing fits (first step) in the process.

There are several communication vehicles that will be included in this phase. Among these are:

- An introductory media relations plan
- A "choice" identity/logo
- An educational video
- A brochure
- A web page
- An outreach educational plan

National Perspective

We have reviewed the materials on Itemized Billing at the websites of Massachusetts, Nevada, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire and California. All of the states discussed itemized billing in a very general manner. The following gives a brief detail of what the states are specifically doing or have done for the Itemized Billing phase of their plan.

Nevada – The consumer education project is still in development. They have not done Itemized Billing yet. They are working on brochures that will outline how the bill will look and how it will be different. Additionally, they are using consumer education templates available from NARUC.

California – Produced a brochure explaining how the new bill would look.

Massachusetts – Produced bill inserts for two consecutive months prior to unbundling.

Plan Objectives

The Consumer Education Program has three main goals:

- increase consumer awareness of retail electric access and related issues
- facilitate informed consumer decision-making
- provide an objective and credible source of information for consumers.

The overall goal of the Itemized Billing phase of the Education Campaign is to raise awareness of the dynamics of Electric Restructuring among consumers. In order to better reach consumers during this phase, we will be seeking assistance from and providing education materials to legislators and other opinion leaders. Specifically in order to achieve these goals, we will:

- Introduce the concept of electric retail choice and communicate the necessary information to residential, commercial and municipal consumers so they can make an educated decision regarding electric choice.
- Inform and educate opinion leaders such as legislators and other officials in an effort to increase the state's knowledge base of electric retail access issues and expand the network of informed groups and individuals.
- Create a strong media relations program to disseminate valuable information about electric retail access to consumers and strengthen the combined impact of all communications strategies.

Based on a statewide consumer belief, we will position the PUC as an objective, credible source of information that people can go to for honest answers to their questions. While focus groups have shown that consumers trust their current electric company, when competition starts these consumers feel their electric companies may skew the information in the company's favor.

Target Audience

For this plan there are several different target audiences, all with varying degrees of understanding of Electric Restructuring.

Residential Consumers

This group also includes "hard to reach" consumers such as elderly, low-income, lesser educated, rural and people with physical or mental disabilities.

Initial research shows residential consumers are interested in learning as much as they can about the changes that are occurring in the electric industry. These consumers are

also more skeptical about their ability to get objective information from companies coming in to the market. These consumers are hopeful that the changes will result in lower costs for them but are concerned that it may not. They are also concerned about the continued reliability of their electric service.

Residential groups needing the most straightforward materials and messages will be elderly, low income and lesser-educated populations. These groups are likely to need the highest level of customized information materials and assistance.

Small Commercial Consumers

It is assumed that many members of this group will have a better understanding of competitive pricing in the business world. Many are less likely to wonder about the rationale behind restructuring of the industry, and more likely to understand its economic value. This target audience includes churches and other non-profit organizations that may not have the same "business" perspective but will be highly concerned about costs. Many in this audience may not have the resources to research the new options and, therefore, will need to be educated.

Municipalities

This audience is entrusted with making decisions for their constituents and will be particularly interested in receiving appropriate information to make an informed decision.

Indirect Target Audience - Opinion Leaders

Although not a formal target audience, proper education of these groups will be vital to the success of this program, as the public will look to these opinion leaders for information about Electric Restructuring. This group includes legislators, the media, and the leaders of community based organizations.

Manner of Delivery

The PUC will initiate a strong media relations program designed to inform municipalities, residential, small commercial consumers and opinion leaders of the changes coming in the electric industry. The PUC and NL Partners plan to work closely with utility partners to ensure that consumers receive a consistent message.

The following outlines the current status of the major utilities' Itemized Billing plans.

- *CMP* plans to produce a bill insert explaining the new bill format, an explanation of the new bill format directly on the bill, an announcement on the envelope directing the customers to look for the changes inside, press releases, TV and radio ads and information on their web site.
- *Bangor Hydro* is in the initial stages of their planning. They recently submitted their proposed changes to their bill to the PUC. Bangor Hydro is looking to

work closely with the PUC and NL Partners during this phase of the education.

- *Public Service* is currently reviewing several options in a corporate sub-committee. Among these are bill inserts, a speakers bureau, and news releases.

We plan to meet with the major utility partners in September to begin the coordination of our messages. We are also in the process of identifying contacts in smaller utility partners throughout the state to assure that all concerned parties are informed as to what actions the PUC is taking to communicate itemized billing changes.

Media Relations

Description

The most important component of any public awareness strategy is the relationship that is formed with the media. It will also be critical to coordinate with utility partners to assure alignment of activities. NL will strive to make key contacts and develop relationships early.

Target Audience

Media opinion leaders: editors, columnists, talk show hosts, TV and radio reporters.

Issues

The focus groups definitively stated their belief that the PUC was the only unbiased expert involved in Electric Restructuring. They believed the utilities were not a good source of information because of their inherent self-interest. In order to place objective information in consumer's hands, it is imperative that we maintain this positioning by the PUC taking "the lead" in educating consumers.

The goal is to get the PUC Commissioners in front of the media as early and as often as possible, so that as the choice date approaches, consumers will be looking toward the PUC for answers to their questions. Once positive media relationships have been created, they should be nurtured throughout the campaign with the release of reliable, factual information and timely responses.

Manner of Delivery/Timing

We will begin delivering our message about Itemized Billing to consumers in early January in order to avoid the holiday advertising clutter that occurs between Thanksgiving and late December. However, we will begin the process of laying the foundation and making key contacts with the Press following the election in November

and December. Our goal will be to generate a blitz of media activity in early January, prior to and during the time that customers will be getting their first itemized bill.

The following details a monthly summary of media relations and educational activities that will be taken prior to the onset of Itemized Billing.

September, 1998

NL will consult or meet with the PR directors from the major electric transmission and distribution utilities to discuss their overall media strategy and explore ways in which we can coordinate efforts. By doing this we can avoid duplicating efforts and ensure a consistent message.

October, 1998

NL will approach the Maine Association of Broadcasters about the possibility of producing a public service announcement for Itemized Billing as the first step in the restructuring process. The PSA would air on all statewide TV and radio stations.

NL will contact the Maine Press Association about a possible panel discussion focusing on communications issues and challenges surrounding retail choice at their spring meeting.

During October we will finalize the Press Kit for distribution in November.

November, 1998

We anticipate a strong media push from major electric transmission and distribution utilities prior to the onset of itemized billing (November/ December). Consequently, we anticipate the PUC/NL will hold a News Briefing following the election and prior to Thanksgiving to officially kick-off the Education Campaign and raise initial awareness among the press, opinion leaders and ultimately...consumers.

We will distribute the Press kit statewide to all TV, radio and print news outlets at the News Briefing. Those media outlets unable to attend the News Briefing will be mailed a Press Kit with a follow up phone call to address any questions. The Press kit will include:

- Pitch letter with story ideas
- Recent Press Releases
- Background piece on Electric Restructuring that offers a national perspective as well as information on Maine.
- Background piece on PUC, Education Campaign and Advisory Panel
- Factsheet explaining the change consumers will see on their bill.
- A mocked up version of the bills that CMP, Bangor Hydro and Maine Public Service will be distributing to their customers.
- Mention of "Choice" Websites

December, 1998

NL will contact public affairs producers and talk show hosts (who need the most lead-time), to arrange for program opportunities in January.

January, 1999

Media/reporter attention may make an additional news briefing necessary in January 1999 in order to respond to any questions or clarify any details they may have about Electric Restructuring. This news briefing could be positioned as an informational roundtable with PUC commissioners or directors available for these questions. Three sessions could be scheduled, one in Portland, Augusta and Bangor to ensure that the sessions be as convenient and accessible as possible, thus reinforcing the media relationship. Following each conference, individual appointments could be made with the commissioners for any further clarification or information needed.

Additional releases would be done on an as needed basis to announce any public forums or other pertinent information relating to Itemized Billing.

Outreach/Education

Description

The goal of the Outreach/Education efforts during the Itemized Billing phase will be to inform and educate opinion leaders about the upcoming changes in Electric Restructuring so that they can give informed advice when their assistance or opinions are solicited.

Target Audience

Opinion leaders: Members of the state administration, the legislature, and the leaders of 'needs based' CBOs. A list of potential needs based CBOs will be furnished by NL for the October Advisory Panel meeting.

Manner of Delivery

The focus groups have overwhelmingly stated that the only unbiased source of information they will trust is the PUC. Accordingly, we will use the PUC Commissioners when available, and when not the PUC Division Directors, to deliver the message.

Administration – Following the election we will contact the Governor's office to arrange an informational meeting for the staff in December or January. The video will be shown and one of the Commissioners (with Patricia Harrington) will outline the history, issues, terms and calendar of events for Electric Restructuring.

Legislature—We plan to give two informational meetings for members of the legislature, their staffs, and committee members during the new member orientation in January. Our intent is to have a representative from the PUC and Patricia Harrington present at the meetings to address their questions. The video will be shown and one of the Commissioners (with Patricia Harrington) will outline the history, issues, terms and calendar of events for Electric Restructuring. An invitation will be sent to all new and

returning legislators.

Additionally, we will take the following actions to ensure that legislators are fully informed to respond to constituent's concerns:

- Schedule a second round of informational meetings in Augusta during the first quarter of 1999 to help legislators respond to constituent concerns regarding Itemized Billing
- Encourage legislators and their staff to reprint materials and publish the Education Campaign toll free number in their constituent newsletters.
- Issue periodic updates to keep legislators informed
- Forward a 1-2 page "talking points" fact sheet that would be readily accessible to offer information to constituents

CBOs - As the focus groups have indicated, consumers do not wish to attend meetings or receive information from membership based CBOs. However, we still see a strong relevance for CBOs, which provide help and information to target groups previously, identified as hard-to-reach (e.g. elderly, economically challenged, English as a second language, rural and people with disabilities). We will utilize these CBO partners as a source for distributing Education Campaign collateral.

We will begin organizing regional meetings of relevant CBOs in January. A representative from the PUC and Patricia Harrington to show the video and outline the history, issues, terms and calendar of events for Electric Restructuring. At these meetings we will distribute Education Campaign collateral.

Additionally, Patricia Harrington will work to develop the Regional Roundtables to provide further feedback to the ongoing effort following the regional meetings in January. We will be ready to respond to requests from any group that are interested in having more information on the history, issues, terms and calendar of events for Electric Restructuring.

Outputs - Logo/Identity

Description

The logo will create a cohesive identity that projects a consumer friendly tone and easily recognizable symbol for the Education Campaign. It will be used on all outputs and communication, so eventually consumers will associate all information bearing the logo as unbiased.

Target Audience

All current and potential electric energy consumers in Maine.

Message

The logo/identity will try to incorporate the following elements in projecting its tone:

- Consumer friendly
- Unbiased
- Reliable,
- Informative
- Electricity
- Choice

Timing

The logo/identity will be completed by November 2, 1998.

Outputs – Toll Free Phone Number**Description**

The Toll Free phone number will provide an easy means for consumers to obtain information about electric restructuring. Initial plans are to staff this line at the PUC. If call volume becomes too heavy to handle 'in-house', the line will be "moved" to an outside call center.

Target Audience

All current and potential electric energy consumers in Maine.

Message

The toll free phone line number will be noted in all advertising, collateral and Education Campaign correspondence. The goal will be to find an easy to remember number that works with the Education Campaign theme.

Timing

The toll free phone number will be selected after the logo/identity is completed in order to coordinate the number with the approved identity theme. We anticipate the toll free phone number being in place by November 15, 1998.

Outputs - Brochure

Description

The objective of the Itemized Billing brochure is to introduce consumers to retail choice and to explain that the changes they are seeing on their bill is the first step in the Electric Restructuring process.

Target Audience

The brochure will be targeted to Municipalities, Residential Consumers, Small Commercial Consumers and Opinion Leaders.

Message

The brochure will contain the following key components:

- *History* – A brief outline of the legislative actions taken to initiate Electric Restructuring, and the basic premise for these actions. The brochure will inform consumers that the purpose for restructuring the industry is to create the industry structure that will, in the long term, result in lower overall electric costs for consumers. It will be clear that the PUC cannot guarantee lower prices.
- *Terms* – One section will outline the basic terms used in Electric Restructuring that will help the consumer better understand what is happening. For example, it will explain the difference between transmission, distribution and generation.
- *Calendar* – Detailing when the key components of Electric Restructuring take place.
- *Sample Bill* – The brochure will contain a mocked up version of an electric bill to educate consumers on what to look for.
- *Frequently asked questions* - The brochure will answer consumers most frequently asked questions regarding Electric Restructuring.
- *Requests for more Info* - This page will provide the consumer with the means to obtain more information: 1) Website URL; 2) 1- (800) Number; 3) The PUC address 4) Participating CBOs
- *Other* - Information on how to change your provider and how to put your name on a do not call list.

Timing

The brochure and fact sheet will be completed by November 15, 1998.

Outputs - Educational Video

Description

The purpose of the video is to provide consumers with an overview of what is happening that explains the changes in easy to understand terms. The video will be designed to cover several uses, including: presentation support; leave behind; TV cable programs; etc.

Target Audience

Depending on quantity the video will be used as a component of the press kit that will be distributed to every media outlet in Maine. It will also be sent to community groups and used as a speaker's tool in any presentations that are given. We will work with cable stations, public TV and regional stations to get the video aired as a program or segment of a program.

Message

The focus of the video will be an explanation of the changes that are occurring to the electric industry. The video will be designed to answer consumer's basic questions. Based on the Focus Groups we anticipate some of these questions to be answered...e.g.:

- What is going on?
- When will this be happening?
- How will this affect me?
- What will my bill look like?
- Will my service still be reliable?
- Will I save money?
- Do I have to switch from my current provider?
- Who is watching out for me?
- What do I need to know to make the right decision?
- What are my choices?
- Where can I get more information?

Thematic Approach

The video will be low key piece that will reflect the real world concerns of real people.

Length

The video will be eight to ten minutes...long enough to cover the subject, but short enough to hold the audience's interest.

Timing

The video will be completed by December 1, 1998.

Outputs - Website

Description

The goal of the Website will be to provide a central and easy to access location for consumer questions about the upcoming changes in Electric Restructuring.

Target Audience

Consumers who have access to a computer with Internet capabilities. One of the strongest points to come out of the focus groups was a need by consumers to read and analyze information about Electric Restructuring on their own terms, in the privacy of their homes. The website is an ideal means to provide them with this information from an unbiased source (an additional concern voiced during the focus groups).

Manner of Delivery - overview

The website address needs to be included in every single output that the education campaign produces. This would include, but not be limited to: collateral, commercials, the video, stationary, and ideally materials developed by the utilities.

The information within the actual website should be very easy to locate. If, as intended, it is to be included as part of the PUC website, we would strongly recommend the addition of a 'button' for Electric Restructuring information on the PUC home page.

Today's traditional website is very visual, and designed for easy access. An average Internet consumer who accesses a website and does not see an easy visual guide to the information they are seeking will most likely not spend a great deal of time at the site.

If it were not possible to place a 'button' on the home page of the PUC's website, we would strongly recommend obtaining a new address. In addition, a separate address could be easier to remember than the current PUC address.

Focus

The focus of the website will be the distribution of information about Electric Restructuring. The following provides an outline and brief description of each page in the site. A website map follows it.

Those items noted below as Base-Plan **(BP)**, are items that are covered in the original plan budget of \$10,000. Those items noted as Recommended Additional Plan **(RAP)** are items that NL believes will enhance the effectiveness of the website and addresses

concerns that have been raised by the Consumer Advisory Panel and the focus groups.

Home Page (BP) - Includes a brief description of the purpose of the site and 'buttons' for the key areas of interest.

History (BP) - Outlines the legislative actions taken to initiate Electric Restructuring, and the basic premise for these actions.

Terms (BP) - Outlines basic terms used in Electric Restructuring that will help the consumer better understand what is happening. A sample "Itemized Bill" will be included.

Calendar (BP) - Detailing when the key components of Electric Restructuring take place.

Rate Sheet (RAP) - This will be the rate sheet for consumer comparison between providers which will include rates and other pertinent information...e.g. what percentage of their business is derived from fossil fuels, renewable sources, etc.

Other (BP) - Information on how to change your provider and how to put your name on a do not call list.

Basic Info Page (BP) - This page will provide the consumer with the means to obtain more information such as the 1- (800) Number and the PUC address

More Info (RAP) Information may include 1) E-mail request form; 2) A link to legislators; 3) Participating CBOs 4) and a link to generators and transmission and distribution providers.

The Plan (BP) - The Education plan would be located at this page.

Thematic Approach

The website will be highly creative, visual, colorful and easy to navigate. The information will be presented in an easy to understand manner. It will feature the Electric Choice identity/logo.

Timing

The website will be completed by December 31, 1998.

Put the Website map here (e-mailed separately)

Evaluation/Reporting

Media relations and community education will be tracked in a variety of ways including:

- Tracking of press and video clippings
- Informal surveys of audiences
- Number of calls to the PUC

Timing

The following gives an overview of key timing dates. For a more detailed view please refer to actual production timetables.

	<i>Dates</i>
Meet with Utility Partners	Early October
Logo/Identity completed	11/01/98
Brochure/Factsheet completed	11/15/98
Toll Free phone line in place	11/15/98
Press kit completed	Late October
Initial Press briefing	Nov. (post election)
Video completed	12/01/98
Website	12/31/98*
Gov. Staff Info mtg.	Early December
Approach media for January stories	Mid December
Legislator Orientation	Early January

*The home page and other pages may be in place by 11/15/98

Budget

Logo/Identity	\$ 5,500*
Brochure / Factsheet	\$ 7,000
Toll Free Phone Line	\$ 161**
Media Relations/Press Kit	\$12,000
Opinion Leader /CBO Education	\$10,000
Video	\$48,000
Website	<u>\$10,000***</u>
Total Itemized Billing	\$92,661

*This cost was contained as part of the development cost of Phase Two outputs (Brochure/Factsheet; Press Kit; and Video).

** Covers the cost of activation (\$56) and the monthly fee (\$4.75) from 11/15/98 – 8/31/00. It does not cover the cost of calls or any systems or operator costs.

*** The \$10,000 covers the cost of those items noted in the Website section as 'base plan'. Those items noted in this section as Recommended Additional Pages (RAP) will cost an additional \$12,500.